



2022 - 2023
37TH SEASON
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JOAN BLACKMAN
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CONCERT THREE ROMANTICISM UNLEASHED

Catherine Ordronneau *piano*
Kai Gleusteen, Joan Blackman *violins*
Jacob van der Sloot *viola*
Zoltan Rozsnyai *cello*

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SUNDAY JAN. 29TH at 2PM
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MONDAY JAN. 30TH at 7:30PM
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Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
String Quartet No. 13 in A minor,
D. 804, Op. 29 “Rosamunde”

I. *Allegro ma non troppo*
II. *Andante*
III. *Menuetto and Trio, Allegretto –Trio*
IV. *Allegro moderato*

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
Après une lecture du Dante:
Fantasia quasi Sonata

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44

I. *Allegro brillante*
II. *In modo d'una marcia. Un poco largamente*
III. *Scherzo: Molto vivace*
IV. *Allegro ma non troppo*

Franz Schubert String Quartet No. 13 in A minor, D. 804, Op. 29 “Rosamunde” (1824)

The “Rosamunde” quartet was written in the same year as Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” quartet when Schubert was still only 27 but already in failing health. Though “Rosamunde” is the less dramatic work of the two, it is more heartfelt and intimate in tone. Schubert often borrowed melodic and rhythmic ideas from his other compositions and this repurposing can be found in all four movements, particularly the gentle song of the slow movement taken from an entr’acte for the play “Rosamunde” written a year earlier.

The first movement echoes Schubert’s song ‘Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel’ not with the melody, but with the second violin accompaniment being a slow-motion version of the spinning wheel motive. Alternating light and dark, yearning and despair, the movement cycles from slow moving melody to brief sunny bits to dramatic episodes, but the bittersweet melody with its spinning wheel accompaniment always returns. Simple, and deceptively serene, it is no wonder that Schubert chose to reuse the material from his Rosamunde entr’acte. The Andante is based on the same long-short-short rhythm that Beethoven used in the slow movement of his seventh symphony. This alternates with a “B” section whose syncopations and off-beat accents contradict the imperturbable flow of the main melody. The second time around, this same melody suddenly changes character and becomes intensely dramatic, with bold modulations and agitated rhythmic figures, before calm simplicity returns at the end.

This unusually lonely sounding Minuetto begins with a quote from Schubert’s song Die Götter Griechenlands

(“The Gods of Greece”) after a poem by Friedrich Schiller. The beginning words of the poem “Fair world, where are you?” must have struck a deep chord with the ailing Schubert. We can almost hear those words in the first call from the cello which develops into the first wistful dance theme. The brighter Trio section calls on a folk idiom, (perhaps a yodel?) to brighten our spirits, but the call returns and the lonely waltz sputters to a close.

In the rondo finale, Schubert shows his brilliant magic in transformation, suavely turning the seemingly light-hearted main theme into a wistful minor variation, a scamper, a folk dance, even a harmonica effect. The movement ends without fanfare, as if to say, yes, even in darkness there is time for levity.

Franz Liszt Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata (“Dante Sonata”) (1849)

Liszt exhibits an entirely different facet of Romanticism: near-impossible virtuosity, impetuosity, wild contrasts, and grandiose themes. This one movement sonata was inspired by Liszt’s reading of Dante Alighieri’s most famous epic poem, the Divine Comedy, whose subject matter must have challenged the composer to pull out all the stops of his imagination. It is a piano sonata in one movement.

The piece is divided into two main subjects. The first theme paints a picture of tormented souls in Hell with the use of the tritone (augmented 4th or diminished 5th), also known as the Devil’s interval. Liszt also chose the Key of D minor for this theme, which for many composers represents tragedy. The second theme is a beatific chorale in F-sharp major, derived from the

first, which represents the joy of those in Heaven. The key is also symbolic here, being the signature for other uplifting works of Liszt's, including Benediction of God in Solitude (part of Harmonies poétiques et religieuses) and Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este. The secondary theme may also represent Beatrice, as it is interspersed within chromatic areas, like the character's appearances in hell. The piece ends with a rapid chromatic octave section that when played at speed seems to split into three distinct themes, reflecting the three heads of Satan in Dante's Inferno.

Robert Schumann Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44 (1842)

The Piano Quintet in E-Flat, Op. 44, composed in Schumann's "year of chamber music" is the first quintet with the instrumentation of string quartet and piano, an innovation which inspired many composers, notably Brahms, to adopt. Schumann's Piano Quintet takes full advantage of the expressive possibilities of these forces in different combinations and is considered among the greatest chamber works of all time. Epic in scope, beautifully written for all instruments, the piano part was conceived with Schumann's virtuoso pianist wife, Clara Wieck in mind.

The expansive first movement opens with an exuberant unison statement with jumping intervals as if to say, here is something new! Soon the conversation between instruments begins, with a sharp contrast between extroverted material like the beginning and the gentle lyricism of the second theme, a wistful dialogue between the cello and viola. The development is based on the main theme only – the piano playing two long virtuoso passages against a simple string accompaniment, which quietly emphasizes the jumping intervals.

In the second movement we enter a solemn funeral march in C minor. Schumann employs two contrasting episodes, the first in a major key to lighten the mood, and the second an agitated variation of the march. But, as in the first movement, we find ourselves in sudden, unexpected places. Listen for rhapsodic changes from

darkness to light. At one point the cello joins the violin in a passionate statement of lament. A few moments later, the gloomy funeral march is interrupted by a cry of terror which leads to the movement's sudden conclusion.

The third movement, a vigorous scherzo, shows what a resourceful composer can do with ascending and descending scales. There are two contrasting middle sections. The first is an inversion of the interval jumps of the main theme of the first movement. The second was originally much simpler, but Mendelssohn complained that it was not lively enough. Schumann rewrote it accordingly, and the result, with its flurries of 16th notes, is the work's most demanding passage for the strings, particularly the cello.

The fourth movement is unorthodox in its key scheme and structure. At least three themes are stated and interlaced in several ways and in different keys, leading to a tremendous climax. This is followed by an astounding coda in which the pianist pounds out with the right hand the main theme of the first movement – the theme with the jumping intervals – while the left hand and the other instruments play against it as a fugue the first theme of the finale.

Program notes by Joan Blackman.

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